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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development, implementation, and evaluation of a first-year action program at Indiana University, South Bend, designed to prepare urban people for careers in education. The program was initiated because of the need presented by the ever growing concentration of blacks in the urban environment who, in many cases, face poor housing, unemployment and no political identity. The concentration of population and high level of unemployment in urban American emphasize the urgent need for educational programs designed to develop marketable skills for individuals. There are demands upon universities to offer such programs for the training of individuals from poverty areas. This training, hopefully, would raise the educational level of the participants, provide them with a set of skills, and create on-the-job training that would lead to full-time employment. (Author/HS)

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AN ANSWER TO A CHALLENGE:

INNOVATION IN UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

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INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan areas in America today face the multifacited problem of a rapidly growing Black population. By the end of the 1970's, most major cities will have Black majorities. However, the existence of a Black majority does not guarantee political influence, economic power or social control by Blacks. Instead, in many cases, Blacks face poor housing, unemployment, and no political identity.

The concentration of population, and high level of unemployment in urban America emphasize the urgent need for educational programs designed to develop marketable skills for individuals. There are demands upon universities to offer such programs for the training of individuals from poverty areas. This training, hopefully, would raise the educational level of the participants, provide them with a set of skills, and create on-the-job training which would lead to full time employment.

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With these issues in mind, Indiana University at South Bend designed a teacher-aide training program for residents of the Model Cities, and Title I areas of the local community. Raising the economic, social, and political position of the Blacks comprised one set of problems, while developing an effective teacher-aide training program represented a second challenge.

For a better understanding of the problems surrounding the first challenge, the authors recommend the April, 1970 issue of Black Scholar. This paper will focus upon the latter challenge. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the development, implementation, and evaluation of a first-year, action program at Indiana University - South Bend designed to prepare urban people for careers in education.

THE PROBLEM

The task incumbent upon the planners of this program was to design a set of educational training experiences meeting the needs of the participants. The primary concern of those involved with program development was to provide instruction, and supportive services to facilitate an effective training program. A particular qualification of this task was the preparation of urban residents for work with children attending

neighborhood schools. The proposed answer to this problem indicated the construction of a curriculum which balanced educational theory and practice. As stated by Baptiste and Meindl (1971), it was believed "that educational theory becomes sterile and enemic in substance when it is devoid of immediate practical use of instructional situations with children."

Silberman (1970) gave support to the blending of theory and practice. He pointed to the inability of teachers to see the relationship between theory and practice as one of the chidf shortcomings of the teaching profession.

Determining the proportion of instruction in education courses offered at the university, and classroom work in local schools required considerable attention. However, it appeared to be clear from the beginning that it was necessary to provide university instruction in educational theory, and on-the-job training concurrently if the program were to reach maximum effectiveness.

THE PROGRAM

The program for teacher-aides at Indiana University - South Bend was directed to the education and training of residents of

the Model Cities and Title I areas. The design of the program required consideration of the eligibility qualifications to be met by participants, and of the curricular innovations providing a balance of university courses and on-the-job training.

Participants:

Applicants were screened by the Community Advisory Council. Priority Consideration was given to those individuals who met Office of Economic Opportunity poverty guidelines, and resided within the target areas. An additional economic consideration was that further education was beyond the financial means of the applicants. The candidates were expected to manifest a desire to work in a school setting with children from low-income families, and to have a personal commitment to succeed in the program. From an original list of 100 applicants, the Community Advisory Council recommended 40 participants who met the eligibility criteria.

Curricular Innovations:

Curricular innovations developed for the first year of the paraprofessional program included two courses designed as technical training courses, and two blocks of courses concerned with the academic development of the participants.

The development of a course titled "Special Endorsement in Chosen Field" provided the essential bridge between university instruction and on-the-job training. As part of the requirements for this course, the participants were assigned to work in instructional and supportive roles in classrooms located in the target areas. The sites selected for this on-the-job training were three schools in the Model Cities area, five Title I schools, and six Headstart Centers. The trainees devoted 20 hours per week to work at one of the eleven designated locations. Very early in the program, the students became involved with children, and with the educational practices of the cooperating schools. For their classroom assistance in this aspect of the program, the participants received a stipend.

Special Endorsement in Chosen Field provided the opportunity for university instructors to work with the classroom teachers to whom the trainees were assigned. The classroom teachers monitored the students' performance, and evaluated their progress. These evaluations were shared with the participants. The university component of this course was to relate educational principles to the classroom practices in which the trainees were engaged. Special Endorsement in Chosen Field was offered as a two credit hour course each semester for continuity in the development of the relationship between theory and practice. On-the-job training was designed to permit the participants to

approach the total teaching experience progressively.

In order to instruct the trainees in the skills necessary for them to function more efficiently as teacher-aides, the university personnel designed a course titled "Practicum in Educational Technology." The purpose of this course was to train the participants in the proper use of a variety of instructional equipment such as; audio - visual aids, mimeograph machines, etc., and to develop their talents in the construction of classroom learning materials. Techniques of individual or small group instruction were discussed in these classes in addition to a range of services within the capacity of teacher-aides. Practicum in Educational Technology provided the opportunity for the university instructors to compliment the training gained through Special Endorsement in Chosen Field. Consultation with the classroom teachers and the participants identified deficiencies in skills, and clarified expectations for the paraprofessional role. These practical needs were met at the university in Practicum in Educational Technology. Like Special Endorsement in Chosen Field, this course was offered each semester.

Since proficiency in the academic areas was recognized as an initial deficit among the majority of the applicants, two blocks of courses were designed to provide education in basic

subjects. These courses were planned to increase the performance of the participants in the regular university courses in which they were enrolled, as well as to advance the level of their classroom assistance as teacher-aides. A Communications Block focused upon instruction in language arts: reading, composition, speech, interpretation, literary analysis, etc. Private tutoring was provided for students needing additional help. A Physical and Biological Science Block provided students with study in these subjects comparable to freshman year courses.

The Communications Block and the Physical and Biological Science Block provided the general education background for students in the first year of the program. The participants enrolled in the professional education courses required for elementary education majors.

The total program design was planned to permit course work to become more individualized as the participants progressed in their studies. Satisfactory completion of courses over the two years of this paraprofessional program leads to the Associate Degree in Educational Technology. The selection of courses during this period was arranged to provide the equivalent of two academic years in the elementary teacher training program. The program was designed to permit individual participants who

have been awarded the Associate Degree in Educational Technology to apply for acceptance to the university teacher training program.

EVALUATION

Program Objectives:

The program designed at Indiana University - South Bend to train urban people for paraprofessional careers in education was directed to meet a challenge presented by the residents of target areas. The participants selected for admission to the program were described as individuals with a high personal and academic risk. High personal risk referred to the probability of individuals to obtain and maintain adequate employment. High academic risk referred to the probability of individuals to perform adequately in a higher education environment. The general hypothesis for the design of the program was that urban people characterized as both high personal and high academic risks could succeed in work, and in a university program if a curriculum were planned to meet their academic needs, and trained them in the skills necessary to function on the job.

Personal and Academic Risk Factors:

The factors which contribute to academic risk are, in many

cases, the same factors which contribute to personal risk. The mother of five children, separated from her husband, has little opportunity to increase her income through employment or to explore formal education opportunities. An unmarried man or woman who is 26 years of age, and has been unemployed for a year, is not likely to have the financial support to enter college. Even though the individual may have graduated from high school, he or she has been away from formal education for approximately 8 years. The inability and reluctance to pursue further education or training affects the individual's capacity for wider employment opportunities. The multiple possibilities for interaction among such factors compounds the influence these variables may have upon individuals.

The present paper reports the results of the first year of the paraprofessional program for teacher-aides. No attempt was made to specify the weight or significance of selected variables at the end of this phase of the program. Rather, a number of factors were considered cumulatively. These factors were age, marital status, number of children in family, education level attained, and previous annual income. The evaluation of this program was conducted in terms of the first-year on-the-job performance, and academic adequacy of participants whose histories suggested that these variables were contributing to their academic and employment limitations.

The degree to which these factors were manifested among the participants was indicated in the personal data collected from the trainees. Usually considered as demographic data, this information appeared to be particularly relevant in an evaluation of a program directed to target area residents. The following data were collected for 38 participants who entered the program in August 1970, and who completed the first year. Of the original 40 selected participants, two left the program before the end of the first year. In the remaining group, there were 34 women, and 4 men.

The age range of the participants was from 18 years to 55 years. The median age was 26 years, and the mean age was 30 years, 4 months.

A survey of the marital status of the group found that 10 of the 34 women were unmarried, 7 were married, 9 were divorced, and 8 were separated. Three of the men were single, and 1 was married.

The number of children in families of the trainees ranged from 0 to 9. The average number of children was approximately 2 (2.6) per family. These data were collected for offspring of the participants. The siblings of unmarried participants were not included.

Upon entering the program, 30 of the participants were high school graduates. Of the 8 participants who had not completed high school, 3 had passed the General Educational Development examination.

Before entering the program, the yearly income of the participants ranged from no income to $6216.00. It must be noted that the person reporting the income of $6216.00 was the sole support of herself and her 7 children.

Evaluation Procedures:

For the purposes of this evaluation, an evaluation scale was designed to rate the participants' performance during the on-the-job training component. This scale rated the trainees on the following 10 characteristics:

1. Dependability
2. Initiative
3. Judgment
4. Rapport with Children
5. Rapport with Adults
6. Personal Appearance
7. Attitude
8. Quality of Work

9. Knowledge of Work

10. Capacity to Work Professionally

It was believed that the characteristics measured by this rating scale would provide an adequate reflection of on-the-job performance. The evaluation scale was distributed to classroom teachers who rated the on-the-job performance of the participants working with them. In addition, daily attendance records were compiled for each of the trainees in order to provide an estimation of individual job absenteeism.

Data reflecting the success of the participants in the university program were collected during the first year. These data included number of credit hours enrolled, and grade point averages computed by the university registrar's office. Records of attendance at university classes were maintained, also.

Program Effectiveness:

The average daily attendance on the job for the first semester was 97.6%. During the second semester, the average daily attendance of the participants was 94.9%.

Classroom teachers evaluated the trainees on a four point rating scale of ten characteristics selected for the purposes

of this evaluation. An average of the ratings on the ten characteristics was computed for each of the participants. The range of these averages was from 1.90 to 4.00. Of the 38 trainees, 22 participants earned average rating of 3.00 or higher, and 16 participants received average ratings of 3.00 or below.

During the first semester, the trainees were enrolled for 14 credit hours of course work at the university. The average attendance at university classes during this period was 91.6%. Grade point averages ranged from 2.29 to 4.00. Twenty-eight students earned a grade point average of 3.00 or higher. Ten trainees received grade point averages below 3.00.

Students were enrolled for 12 credit hours of course work at the university during the second semester. Average attendance at classes was 89.3%. Individual grade point averages ranged from 1.16 to 4.00. At the end of the second semester, 22 students earned grade point averages above 3.00, while 16 students received grade point averages below 3.00.

DISCUSSION

It was the purpose of this paper to report the development,

implementation, and evaluation of an action program directed to the training of residents of Model Cities and Title I areas for paraprofessional careers in education. The design of the program required the introduction of curriculum innovations which would relate educational theory to instructional practice in a meaningful way. At the same time, this curriculum had to meet the academic needs of the trainees while providing them with the technical skills required for effective on-the-job performance.

The effectiveness of the program was evaluated in view of a number of variables which have particular relevance for target area residents. High attendance averages, both on the job and at university classes, were reported for each semester of the first scholastic year of the program. Above average ratings of on-the-job performance, and above average grade point averages were reported for the same period.

These findings become more significant when the high personal risk, and high academic risk factors of the participants selected for admission to the program were considered. As an example of the unique pattern of the influence of demographic variables among this group, the marital status of the trainees may be cited. Ten of the 34 women were unmarried. However, 4 of these women were mothers, and carried the responsibility of

child care. The drop in average daily attendance during the second semester was a reflection of the fact that two of the participants underwent surgery during this period. The addition of the Physical and Biological Science Block accounted for the lower number of students who earned a grade point average above 3.00 during the second semester. While this latter point indicated the difficulty the trainees encountered in this block, it indicated, also, the sequential development of courses designed to provide general education background for the students.

The review of the first year indicated that the curriculum developed to train paraprofessionals for employment as teacher-aides contributed to the attainment of the program objectives. The continuation of this program at Indiana University - South Bend has provided an opportunity for further curriculum innovation, and has offered some suggestions for incorporation into existing teacher training models. Evaluation of the second year of the program is now in progress.

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